

Top 10 frequently asked questions with school liaison Norma Melo



1. I have school-age students (kindergarten to 12th grade) and am new to Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Is educational support available for my family on base?

Yes. School Support Services and School Liaison are a part of Child, Youth and School Services, and they work in conjunction with the local school communities to address educational issues involving children of military families.

At Joint Base Lewis McChord, there are more than 20 school districts where our military and federally connected employee's children attend public schools. That is a large number of military children who are affected by local and school policies that may impact their educational journey. There are three full-time school liaison officers in the School Support Services Department that work directly with school district staff to help families link with the school and district services needed.

2. How do I contact the JBLM school liaison?

Antoinette Walker is the liaison for North Thurston Public Schools, Olympia and Tumwater School District and Yelm Community Schools. Aundrea Witt is the liaison for Steilacoom Historical School District, University Place and Puyallup School District. I am the liaison for Clover Park, Bethel, Sumner, Fife and Federal Way school districts.

All school liaisons can be reached by calling 253-967-7195 or by email at usarmy.jblm.imcom.list.dfmwr-cys-schools-liaison@mail.

mil. The office, located at Waller Hall, Bldg. 2140, in Room 400, is open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

3. Are there Department of Defense Schools in Washington state?

There are no DOD schools in Washington state. By law, schools in Washington state are run by the local school boards which have been elected. The superintendents of the school districts work for the school boards and operate the districts much like a business.

4. Where will my child attend school? Do I have a choice?

In Washington state, where a student attends school depends on where the child lives, for the most part. Boundary areas allow for a school to be assigned to each home to alleviate and control overcrowding. Some school districts will change boundary areas due to the overcrowding to balance out classrooms. Notification is given to the community prior to the school year that will be affected.

Should you want your child to attend a different school than the one your student is zoned for, you would need to seek a "release of attendance" for another in district school or an out of district school. You should be aware that should you choose to get a waiver, the school district will not provide transportation to or from the school. Transportation is the family's responsibility.

5. Are there charter or magnet schools in Washington? How do I apply?

Washington state recently obtained voter approval to create and operate charter schools. In the South Puget Sound area, an elementary school - SOAR Academy in Tacoma - is in its second year of operation and will host kindergarten through second grade students. There will be a new kindergarten class each year until students progress to fifth grade.

Visit soaracademies.org to learn more. Destiny Middle School in Tacoma is enrolling sixth and seventh grade students. Summit Olympus High School in Tacoma operates a ninth- to 12th-grade program. Space is limited; registration for the next school year begins in January.

6. How old does my child need to be to start kindergarten?

By state law, a child must be age 5 by Aug. 31 of the year entering kindergarten. A birth certificate is necessary along with immunization records. Kindergarten is not mandatory for children in Washington state. To enter first grade, a student must be age 6 by Aug. 31.

7. Where can I learn more about homeschooling?

Homeschool is a family decision. To homeschool in Washington state, there are some requirements which can be found on the **k12.wa.us** website, including a letter of intent. There are many homeschool groups that work together to provide activities and field trips. Please be aware that Washington state does not mandate background checks on adults who homeschool. Some school districts offer additional services for homeschool children such as competitive sports, advanced classes, choir and orchestra.

8. How do I enroll my child in school?

For kindergarten, you will need the birth certificate, immunization records and proof of residence. For first through 12th grades, you will need to provide immunization records, proof of residence and last report card with the school information (school name, address, phone number and fax number). If your child wants to play sports (grades seven through 12th), request sports physical paperwork from the school, have the child seen by a doctor and return the completed form to the school.

9. Which is the best school in the local area?

Each school is committed to providing an educational journey for each student that challenges them to try new and different ways of learning and to view and problem solve using higher level thinking skills. Each student is at a different stage in their learning; it is impossible to say that one school is better than another solely based on test scores. Be open to what the schools are teaching and what your student is learning.

We remind parents that education is not just a grade or a score but a process as students become life-long learners. We encourage families to get involved, get to know the teachers and office staff and attend events at school. Ask questions if you have a concern. The principal and staff cannot address an issue if they aren't aware that it is of concern to you.

10. What if my child needs a tutor or extra help?

CYSS' School Age Services and the Teen Zone offer a Power Hour program weekdays from 3 to 4 p.m. to focus specifically on homework. The computer lab is open Mondays to Thursdays from 3 to 6 p.m. with an onsite staff member to assist students. You must be registered to use the facility.

To register, call Parent Central at 253-966-2977, email

[**jblmcysregistration@conus.army**](mailto:jblmcysregistration@conus.army.mil).mil or visit the Teen Zone at 6397 Garcia

Blvd. Additionally, [**tutor.com**](https://www.tutor.com) is an online tutoring program that is available anytime to assist military families, including one on one help. Tutors are available for the entire family with school work, resumes, proof-reading and SAT/ACT preparation.